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***More than Two-thirds of Trade Mission Meetings Produce  
Business Leads***

With concrete business leads in place, today Lt. Governor Becky Skillman announced the success of the Central America Trade Mission. The 34-member delegation returned Friday from the six-day mission to Guatemala, Costa Rica and Panama. Lt. Governor Skillman and Congressman Dan Burton led this first American trade mission to the region since Congress ratified the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA).

“We went to Central America to bring home opportunities for hardworking Hoosiers and I think the follow-up phone calls, trips, and collaborations already planned show a level of success far beyond what we anticipated,” said Lt. Governor Skillman who also serves as Indiana Secretary of Agriculture and Rural Development. “Our goal was to build relationships and lay the groundwork for future economic development. We accomplished those goals and then some. I believe we will have business deals on the table in the next six months.”

The Indiana delegation, composed of government, commodity organization, academic, food and agribusiness leaders, held as many as 80 meetings as part of the trade mission. More than two-thirds of those meetings already have resulted in plans for follow-up actions. Delegates have begun to forge business relationships by agreeing to send product samples to contacts made in Central America and scheduling return trips to the region. There is even talk of a reverse trade mission from Guatemalan food processors.

The following are two, of many, success stories already in the works:

- In Panama, the Indiana Hardwood Lumbermen’s Association met with a wood products manufacturer specializing in flooring, office and hospitality furniture. The business, headquartered in Panama City, employs 250 people. Among the goals of this business is to diversify its use of American wood species. It was determined that Indiana has the perfect suppliers and species, oak, maple, and

walnut, for this company. Dimension requirements were provided to the IHLA's Ray Moistner. He will put the Panamanian company in touch with Indiana vendors.

- Prior to the delegation leaving Panama, the Guatemalan Food Processors' Association (GREFAL) contacted Indiana Agriculture Director Andy Miller expressing interest in a reverse trade mission. GREFAL's Jose Orive encouraged continued open business opportunities, which support small- and medium-sized entrepreneurs in Guatemala and allow them to enjoy U.S. agricultural products, such as pork and bacon. A reverse trade mission would further grow relationships and identify opportunities between Hoosier businesses and their Guatemalan partners.

Lt. Governor Skillman, Rep. Burton (R-Ind.) and Director Miller met with high-level government leaders including Guatemalan President Oscar Berger and Costa Rican Minister of Agriculture Rodolfo Coto. They discussed CAFTA and the mutual benefits of trade with Indiana. Lt. Governor Skillman was pleased with the positive nature of the conversations. Beyond the relationships built among government and business leaders in Central America, another byproduct of the mission was the collaboration among the delegates.

“After spending a week together, the members of our delegation now are familiar with each others' businesses, and they are bringing opportunities to each other,” said Director Miller. “This was a unique opportunity to work together for an extended period of time and gather information from each other. I think it will only strengthen Indiana's effort to grow Indiana agriculture and thereby our state's economy.”

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